



Sedgwick County

SUICIDE PREVENTION TASK FORCE

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Stigma Surrounding Mental Health Issues Can Prevent Successful Treatment

(Sedgwick County, Kansas) – One out of four people in the world will be affected by mental or neurological disorders at some point in their lives. Nearly two-thirds of those with diagnosable mental disorders will not seek treatment. Stigma, discrimination and neglect often prevent people with mental disorders from receiving care and treatment. Mental disorders are also tragic contributors to mortality; suicide perennially represents one of the leading preventable causes of death in the United States.

“Mental health is fundamental to a person’s overall health, indispensable to personal well-being and instrumental to leading a balanced and productive life,” says David Satcher, M.D., Surgeon General, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. “Stigmatization of people with mental disorders has persisted throughout history, manifested by bias, distrust, stereotyping, fear, embarrassment, anger, and/or avoidance.”

Dr. Satcher reports that stigma leads others to avoid living, socializing or working with, renting to or employing people with mental disorders, especially severe disorders. It reduces patient access to resources and leads to low self-esteem, isolation and hopelessness. Sadly, it deprives people of their dignity and interferes with their full participation in society.

In Sedgwick County, continuing efforts by the Suicide Prevention Task Force are focusing on community education and increased public awareness of mental illness, in addition to available treatment options. In 2001, the Task Force directed a subcommittee to look at community approaches to increase public awareness of mental illness and suicide in Sedgwick County and reduce the stigma attached.

“Education is the key,” says Sedgwick County Commission Chairman Ben Sciortino. “The Sedgwick County Suicide Prevention Task Force is helping to build trust through public awareness and education that treatment is effective for those with mental illnesses, and ensure that people know there are a variety of treatment choices available to persons. We also need to reduce the barriers to treatment and make care easily accessible.”

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“Sedgwick County - Strengthening Lifelines”